

## Lord, Teach Us to Pray (LK 11:1)

“Once Jesus was in a certain place praying. As he finished, one of his disciples came to him and said, *“Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”*

<sup>2</sup> Jesus said, *“This is how you should pray:*

*“Father, may your name be kept holy.*

*May your Kingdom come soon.*

<sup>3</sup> *Give us each day the food we need,*

<sup>4</sup> *and forgive us our sins,*

*as we forgive those who sin against us.*

*And don’t let us yield to temptation.”*

Sounds familiar, right, but slightly different? This is the **Lord’s Prayer** as it is written in the **Gospel of Luke**. The one most of us have memorized is from Matthew’s Gospel.

So let’s begin today by praying that together! All of us, with one voice... slowly, deliberately, thoughtfully, and with a pause between each line...ready? During the pause, mentally read that line again:

**“Father, may your name be kept holy....”**

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As we prayed that prayer slowly together, did you get a ***kadoink***? Kathy Schmider, a dear friend who is now fully enjoying the presence of Jesus, used to use that word, *kadoink*, when God would get her attention about something.

So did you get a ***kadoink***? Did God highlight a phrase of that prayer for you? Did one of those lines trigger something in you... a hope, a fear, a praise, a regret, a memory, or something left undone?

If He did... if you got a *kadoink*... then this is a sacred moment for you. Note it down... perhaps later, press into it... or perhaps now! God wants to get your attention about something. He

wants to have a heart to heart talk with you. Prayer is all about your heart... your heart connecting with God's heart.

Today we get to start a new series about **Prayer**! And although I get to kick this series off, I have to tell you that I certainly don't stand before you as any kind of expert on this subject... far from it. This sermon, just so you know, is mostly for me, but you can listen in if you want.

So... **Why don't we pray much?** Why don't I pray much? There are a lot of reasons I suppose. We're busy. We forget. Our minds are so focused on our work or a problem that our awareness of the Kingdom of God fades. And then there's the **fear**. Fear that I won't do it right. Fear that no one is listening. Fear that it won't make any difference anyway. All these things conspire to keep me from praying like I should. How about you?

Now don't you go feeling guilty! I'm not here to make you **guilty**... I'm here to **get you going** in prayer... to encourage **you and me** to pray; to teach us about prayer, and to get us all started on a prayer adventure!

**What does it mean to pray?** Seriously: what is prayer supposed to be like? How do we do it? Is it an incantation? Are there specific guidelines? Can we memorize it? Or is it more like something you mutter under your breath...before a big interview... or on the way to the doctor's office... or, in my case, before 3<sup>rd</sup> period? I'll update you on 3<sup>rd</sup> Period in a few, but first let's look at one of my favorite stories in the Gospels:

In the gospel of Mark, there is the story of a man who was way beyond the end of his rope. He had tried everything he could think of to heal his troubled son... all to no avail. This man had no idea what else to do, but he was willing to try one more thing, one last ditch attempt to save the life of his son. We pick up the story in Mark 9.

*"When they returned to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd surrounding them, and some teachers of religious law were arguing with them. When the crowd saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with awe, and they ran to greet him. "What is all this arguing about?" Jesus*

asked.

*One of the men in the crowd spoke up and said, “Teacher, I brought my son so you could heal him. He is possessed by an evil spirit that won’t let him talk. And whenever this spirit seizes him, it throws him violently to the ground. Then he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast out the evil spirit, but they couldn’t do it.” Jesus said to them, “You faithless people! How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.”*

*“So they brought the boy. But when the evil spirit saw Jesus, it threw the child into a violent convulsion, and he fell to the ground, writhing and foaming at the mouth.*

*“How long has this been happening?” Jesus asked the boy’s father.*

*He replied, “Since he was a little boy. The spirit often throws him into the fire or into water, trying to kill him. Have mercy on us and help us, if you can.”*

*“What do you mean, ‘If I can’?” Jesus asked. “Anything is possible if a person believes.” The father instantly cried out, **“I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!”***

*When Jesus saw that the crowd of onlookers was growing, he rebuked the evil spirit. “Listen, you spirit that makes this boy unable to hear and speak,” he said. “I command you to come out of this child and never enter him again!”*

*26 Then the spirit screamed and threw the boy into another violent convulsion and left him. The boy appeared to be dead. A murmur ran through the crowd as people said, “He’s dead.” 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and helped him to his feet, and he stood up.*

*28 Afterward, when Jesus was alone in the house with his disciples, they asked him, “Why couldn’t we cast out that evil spirit?”*

*29 Jesus replied, “This kind can be cast out only by prayer.”*

***“This kind can be cast out only by prayer.”***

So let me give you an update on 3rd period. A couple of months ago I described how rough my 3<sup>rd</sup> period class was and I asked you to pray for them. Well, as usually happens, things got worse before they got better. One class recently was exceptionally horrible. No way to put a good spin on it, it sucked! The kids were rowdy and unruly, and two in particular really began being disrespectful and defiant, so I had to put them in what I call, “an alternate educational

*location.*" (which is outside my room in the hallway.) Even out there, after several minutes of cooling down time, they were still both recalcitrant... so they stayed out there. And I returned to the class feeling like a total failure.

Well right before vacation, one of the ringleaders, this girl named Genesis, was forced to come to my extra help time... she didn't want to be there, but I helped her figure out some physics problems then I circulated around helping other kids too. She called me over to explain something... wow, she really wanted to get this... there was a spark... where did that come from! Oh wait... **some of you were praying**... In the last few minutes, I asked her to come into my lab prep room for a minute... she had a sheepish grin on... and I was able to tell her how proud I was of her on this day, how much I cared about her and her future, and that I was in her corner... and could she please stop being such a pain in the **bleep** in class! (Actually, it rhymed better when I said it to her...). In any case, she agreed.

Now I won't tell you that 3<sup>rd</sup> period is perfect now... far from it. But by the grace of God, I've got one of the ringleaders on my side now... and a kid who was rocking an "F" just got an 87 on her last quiz and wants an "A" in the class! This week we had one of the best classroom discussions about gravity and space and interplanetary travel. And when Katie happened to walk into the room they gave her a standing O! Where did all that come from? Trust me, I'm not that good.

***"This kind only comes out by prayer."***

***"This kind **only comes out** by prayer."***

***"This kind only comes out **by prayer**."***

Some of you have been praying. You have been bringing these kids to Jesus. You have poured strength and wisdom and courage and love into my heart. Believe it. I feel it.

And I am deeply and profoundly grateful. Thank you. And... please don't stop... I just received a new class of wild things who must be tamed before they can learn. So the process begins anew... Please... add **Period 1** to your prayers!

What do you do when you don't know what to do?! You pray! What do you do when you've tried everything and nothing has worked? You pray!

Here's where we're heading in our conversation about prayer today... Four Prayer Principles:

**Pray... Just Pray**

**Pray with Honest Faith.**

**Pray with and without Words.**

**Pray First**

**Pray... Just Pray**

In the story from Mark I read, a desperate Dad brought his disturbed son to the disciples. Try as they might, they could do nothing against the demonic power that held the boy in its grip.

What happens next gives us the most beautiful picture of the essence of prayer in the Bible! Look at verse 20.

***"So they brought the boy."*** That's it!

Where did they bring him? ***"They brought the boy to Jesus."*** That's prayer in its simplest, most gut level form, and it's our first Prayer Principle today: **Pray... Just Pray. Pray... Just Pray**

Because when you pray you are **bringing it to Jesus!** You are bringing that **loved one** to Jesus, you are bringing that **really difficult situation** in your life to Jesus, you are bringing that **crushing burden**, that **secret sin**, that **heartache**, that **impossible person**... you are bringing them all to Jesus. Why? **Because He is Jesus, He is the Lord, the Son of the Living God!** He the One who can do something! He is the One who knows what's best! He is the One who imparts hope and peace and comfort and strength! He is the One who's been here and knows

what being human is like! What do you do when you don't know what to do? **You pray... just pray!** You bring it to Jesus!

Secondly, **Pray with Honest Faith.**

The desperate Dad brings the boy to Jesus and says:

*"Have mercy on us and help us, if you can." "What do you mean, 'If I can'?" Jesus asked. **"Anything is possible if a person believes."** The father instantly cried out, **"I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!"***

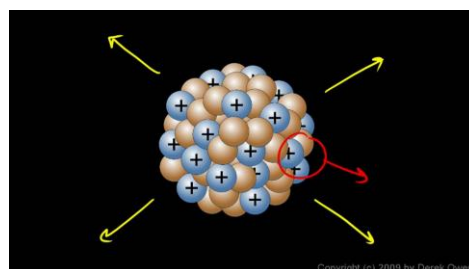
Is faith necessary in prayer? Absolutely. Jesus Himself said, *"Anything is possible if a person believes."* But, is **perfect faith, 100% belief** with **no doubts** necessary? Absolutely NOT!

Here's the thing: the issue isn't the size of our faith, it's the **size of our God!** It's not how great our **faith** is, it's **how great our God** is!

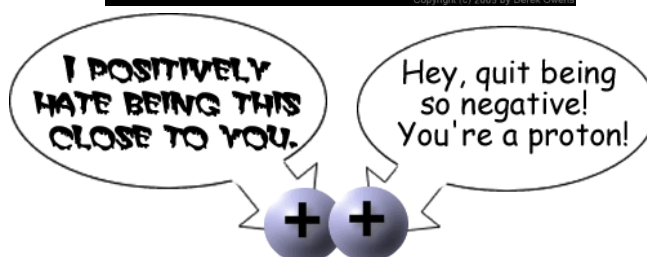
Let's be honest... the faith of the best of us is so flimsy and weak, and on any given day, it may hardly be there at all! But it's not the size of your faith that matters, it's the **size of your God!** And your God is pretty big! Your God spoke the universe into existence! Matter and energy and time itself sprang into existence at the Word of our Creator God!

Did you know that God holds the very atoms of your body together by His mighty power? Let me give you a quick Physics lesson: the nucleus of an atom is made of two types of particles: **protons and neutrons...**

packed densely together. The number of them determines whether it's an atom of carbon, or of oxygen, or of iron. Now protons have a positive charge... does anyone here know what two



up



positive charges do to one another when you bring them close together? That's right... opposites attract, but **like charges repel**. So what holds all those protons together in the nuclei of every atom of your body? Physicists have a name for it. They call it... are you ready? The **nuclear strong force**. That's it. They have no idea how it works!

Here's my theory: God holds the atoms of your body together... and if He can do that, then He can hold your life together as well.

Jesus never asked for BIG faith. He asks for **honest faith**. It works because it's all about God and who He is... so you can **pray with honest faith**... ***"I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!"***

The third prayer principle is to  
**Pray With and Without Words...**

***"Lord, teach us to pray..."*** Why did the disciples ask that of Jesus? Did they feel like they were doing it wrong? Did they think that Jesus had some kind of magic prayer bullet?

No. The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray because they had **watched** Him pray. They had **listened** to Him pray, and it was **different**. It wasn't **formal**, yet it was incredibly **sacred**. When Jesus prayed: He was **talking with God His Father**. When Jesus prayed, there was no stuffiness, no formula; there was no preferred posture or special head gear. When Jesus prayed it was as if He was just talking... talking to God! Because He was.

So it should be for us: when you pray, **just talk with God**. Talk honestly with Him. Share your heart with Him. God doesn't really care about formulas. He cares deeply about your heart. But sometimes we really don't know what to say... our hearts are so burdened and overwhelmed... when that happens, let me point you to the **Psalms**.

Jot these psalms down for the next time you or someone you love are facing difficult challenges. **Psalms 69 and 77**. There are many other great ones... but these were prayers written to God

in the darkest of times. Let me read you a bit from Ps 69:

*“Save me, O God, for the floodwaters are up to my neck. <sup>2</sup> Deeper and deeper I sink into the mire; I can’t find a foothold. I am in deep water, and the floods overwhelm me. <sup>3</sup> I am exhausted from crying for help; my throat is parched.*

Can you relate? Sure you can... or you will someday! Then it continues...

*“But I keep praying to you, Lord, hoping this time you will show me favor.*

*In your unfailing love, O God, answer my prayer with your sure salvation.*

*14 Rescue me from the mud; don’t let me sink any deeper! Save me from those who hate me, and pull me from these deep waters. 16 Answer my prayers, O Lord, for your unfailing love is wonderful.”*

Good, honest prayer. Sometimes I can talk with God quite naturally... other times, the Psalms help me articulate my heart’s cry to God. But there are times... deep times, and dark... when words of any kind fall short or are simply impossible. When that happens, you need to know that you can also

### **Pray With Words and Pray Without Words...**

Praying without Words. How do we do that? The beauty is that we don’t have to. There are times when there are no words. You try to speak but nothing comes out. You try to pray but your mind can’t put cogent thoughts together. That’s when the **Holy Spirit** takes over:

*“And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don’t know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words.”*

(Rom 8:26)

Katie’s younger sister Amy, has been battling cancer for the past few years... and it got especially tough during the last few months. She went home to be with the Lord on Feb 20.



We were able to be with her in some of her final hours. They were sacred moments. Amy was just 58 years old... with a loving husband and three grown kids. Just recently she had become a Grandma. But despite all the advanced treatments of radiation & chemotherapy, cancer overcame her earthly body.

You know how medical professionals tell you that even if a person seems unresponsive, they can still hear you? Several times we went in to be with her. Katie was in the room with her for extended periods of time. And during all those times, Amy was largely unresponsive. But during one of those times, Katie read some Scriptures to her... a couple of the Psalms, and we prayed with her... and Katie said at the end, a big exaggerated "Amen!" And Amy, who had been motionless and soundless until that point, hummed a very distinct, "Mmm-mmmm!" Amen! It was a sacred moment; and I realized this was one of those Romans 8:26 times... the Holy Spirit praying for us with groanings too deep for words. Praying without words.

Pray... Just Pray

Pray with Honest Faith.

Pray with Words and without Words

**Pray First!**

About the demon-possessed boy, the disciples asked Jesus, "*Why couldn't we drive it out?*" Jesus replied, "*This kind can come out only by prayer.*"

Pray First! Pray first.

So why couldn't they cast this one out? Jesus tells them why: you didn't pray. This kind only comes out by prayer – and apparently, guys, you didn't pray! You get a hint of this in their question: "*Why couldn't **we** do it?*" The focus was on we... what they could do... maybe the right technique or the perfect words.

God allowed them to fail! Why? To teach them **dependence** – to teach them to pray. That no

matter how many times they've done this, it is and always will be a miracle wrought by God. Techniques and formulas aren't the issues: the issue is dependence, and that is demonstrated in prayer. So pray first! Not just as a last resort, not just when all else fails. **Pray first!**

There's so much to this subject of prayer... people have written books... many, many entire books on prayer. So we have to admit up front that we can't cover everything... and I'm sure you have a lot more questions than we can answer. If you're game, here are three ways you can go with this prayer thing:

1) We have little **Prayer Cards** printed up for you to list three people for whom you will pray during Lent. This would be a great way to make a start... list three people... and don't forget my Periods 1 & 3!

2) We have **40 Days of Prayer Journals** that follow along with the sermons between now & Easter! The first one is free for you. (They cost \$3 to make.)

3) Third, if you have something overwhelming going on in your life right now, and you need to be prayed for and with... please come right up to the front here right after the service ends. I will be here, and others from the **Prayer Team** will be here. We will pray for you!

4) And finally... we have a prayer group that meets on Tuesday nights right here... they pray locally, they pray globally! Come join them and learn to pray!

Let's pray now...

